



**Partners in Aid**

AUSTRALIA

# Annual General Meeting 2023

## Chair's report

### 1. Partners in Aid

Partners in Aid (PIA) was established in 1962 to support very poor families in India and Bangladesh. A lot has changed since then; however, we continue to be guided by:

- a **vision** of enduring, capable communities,
- a **mission** to partner with not-for-profit organisations overseas to support sustainable community and economic development projects that these organisations have selected and are implementing to enable their local communities to thrive through better health, education and livelihoods and,
- **values** of integrity, dignity and effectiveness.

Our **short-term objectives** in 2023 were to assist community-based, socio-economic development projects in developing countries. The projects that we are currently assisting include watershed management, sustainable agriculture, environmental sanitation, poverty alleviation, health education and child education sponsorship.

Our **long-term objectives** are to help not-for-profit organisations in developing countries to enable rural and urban communities to enhance their quality of life by making sustainable improvements in their environment, health, education and income generating activities.

We prioritise supporting projects which, through the provision of training, advocacy and/or financial and/or technical assistance, enable residents to bring about sustainable changes in behaviour in their community. The emphasis is on helping to remove physical, economic, attitudinal or knowledge-based barriers to behavioural change in order to facilitate such change. Infrastructure is usually only funded as a means of removing barriers to particular behavioural change.

The Partners in Aid Board believes that an appropriate way of achieving the organisation's mission is through strong relationships with a small number of overseas Partner

Organisations which have shared values and which we can trust to work effectively with their local stakeholders. Accordingly, the organisation seeks to form long-standing relationships with overseas not-for-profit organisations that are acting as agents of change in their local communities and are seeking thereby to help achieve sustainable improvements in the health and well-being of those communities. Such projects are the primary instrument by which Partners in Aid collaborates with its Partner Organisations to realise its mission.

Before proceeding further, I would like to begin by acknowledging the contributions throughout 2022–2023 of our donors, some of whom have been contributing to particular projects over many years. It is these donors who enable us to continue supporting such worthy projects. We realise that inflation and the longer-term impacts of COVID, have made it difficult for some of our donors to continue contributing to our projects. We fully understand the need for some donors to withdraw their support and very much appreciate their past contributions.

## 2. Partners in Aid’s income and expenditure for the financial year 2022–2023 and overall financial position

In the 2022–23 fiscal year, Partners in Aid’s income was \$127,005 which included \$125,206 in direct donations. This represented a decrease of \$10,732 in donations, an amount we expect was a consequence of our phasing out of the Bangladesh projects which had a number of long-term contributors.

Throughout 2022–23, our total expenditure was \$15,099 of which \$136,687 was expended on the following projects:

- Bangladesh (final payment): \$16,500.
- Philippines: \$22,000.
- Sri Lanka: \$520.
- SEDS Child Sponsorship): \$39,370.
- SEDS Sustainable Agriculture: \$47,945.
- All Bengal Women’s Union: \$10,352.

Administration costs, excluding travel costs associated with field visits to project sites, totalled \$12,669, 10 % of our total income. This percentage was a little higher than in past years – it is our goal to always keep administrative costs at less than 10% of income. The increase was due to a couple of factors – the combination of inflated costs and lower income, and the one-off cost of employing IT specialists to improve our cyber security. Any serious attempt to establish new partnerships with overseas not-for-profit organisations and to fund new projects with such organisations is limited at this stage until we can increase our funding capacity. In 2021 we had already started working on meeting the necessary requirements to apply for Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

accreditation. Work on this application had to be temporarily suspended this year due to limited human resources. However, we hope to resume working on it in 2024 as, if successful, it would open the way for the funding of several new projects providing they met DFAT approval.

Other ways of raising funds, such as grant applications, must also be a priority this fiscal year.

### 3. The most significant aid and development activities undertaken during 2022–2023

This fiscal year, we have continued supporting five projects:

- the Sinangpad Association’s Sinangpad Healthy Village Project in the Philippines,
- the Social Education and Development Society’s (SEDS) Sustainable Agriculture Project in India,
- the SEDS Child Education Sponsorship in India,
- Y Gro’s Empowering War Widows and Women Headed Families Economically Through Sustainable Dairy Farming Initiatives Project in Sri Lanka, and
- the All Bengal Women’s Union’s Children’s Home and After Care Home in India.

#### Sinangpad Healthy Village Project

The overall goal of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project is to achieve sustained health improvements in remote Kalingan villages by enabling the residents **themselves** to identify and resolve the local environmental risks to health and well-being that they consider to be a priority. At the community level, training, community mobilisation, assistance with action planning and support to enable communities to remove barriers to behavioural change are all activities implemented by the Sinangpad Association with a view to bringing about sustained changes in behaviour that otherwise involves risks to health.

#### Sustainable Agriculture Project

The goals of the SEDS Sustainable Agriculture Project are to:

- support a strong people’s institution responsible for enabling poor rural farmers, especially women, to improve their living standards by promoting sustainable livelihoods, management of natural resources, and community-owned and managed health and education initiatives, and
- work towards a sustainable environment and to enhance and manage natural resources by preventing soil erosion and increasing soil fertility through local inputs, increasing water resources through more efficient catchment and promoting sustainable agriculture techniques.

### Child Education Sponsorship

The SEDS Child Education Sponsorship project had its genesis in the Sustainable Agriculture Project. During field visits carried out in the course of that project, it was realised that a significant number of farmers' children could not afford to attend school. Partners in Aid, through sponsors, covers the cost of two sets of school clothes each year, books, school bag, shoes, school fees and the monthly activities at the SEDS campus where students take part in various activities. These can include cultural, sporting and health clinic days at which children are measured and weighed; occasional visits by doctors and dentists; and measuring for school uniforms. A set of new clothes is provided as part of an annual present from each child's sponsor.

### Empowering War Widows and Women Headed Families Economically Through Sustainable Dairy Farming Initiatives Project

After we phased out involvement with Symbiosis Bangladeshi projects in March 2022, we supported a 12-month 'pilot' project with a potential new Partner Organisation in Sri Lanka. This engagement was part of our desire to expand our operations and establish new partnerships with overseas not-for-profit organisations that share our values. This project was implemented in the northern city of Jaffna and was designed to help war widows and female-headed households with one or two dairy cows to achieve a sustainable income.

This was Partners in Aid's first venture into community development in Sri Lanka and it was hoped that if all went well the project would lead to a Partnership Agreement and new projects in the future. Y Gro managed to achieve most of the intended activities in their initial proposal, despite the economic crisis that Sri Lanka was facing. Accordingly, we are now in the process of working with Y Gro to refine a proposal for a three-year project that the Y Gro team has submitted which will continue to support war widows with dairy farms in Jaffna. The possibility of establishing a Partnership Agreement with Y Gro is also being discussed by the Board.

### The All Bengal Women's Union Homes

The All Bengal Women's Union provides broad ranging support for girls and women in a Children's Home and an After Care Home. These residents have been brought there by the court or other government or non-government agencies, generally from abusive or destitute backgrounds. While a project supporting these girls and women deviates somewhat from Partners in Aid's current main mission, the support has been provided for many years by a number of very committed donors. The Board has decided, notwithstanding the nature of the project, to continue support.

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The key achievements of each of these projects will be discussed in detail by the Project Coordinators in their upcoming Project Reports.

#### 4. Evaluation into the effectiveness of and the learning from aid and development activity

The aim of Partners in Aid is to have a Partners in Aid Project Coordinator make on-site visits to the projects we support on a regular basis. In these visits, project monitoring and evaluation is undertaken as well as discussions on project directions. Particular attention was paid during visits this year to working with our Partner Organisations to ensure that they are all moving towards having effective, locally appropriate Child Safeguarding, Privacy, Finance and Gender Equity and Diversity Policies in place.

We have received narrative and regular financial reports from all our Partner Organisations.

#### 5. Board and Project Coordinator Changes

This year is bringing some changes with respect to Board membership and Project Coordinator roles.

##### Board Changes

Nethmi Jayakody has resigned from the Board due to personal circumstances. Ruth Martinez is also resigning as she focuses more on the international development work she has been committed to for many years through Rotary.

We are also welcoming two new members who have been nominated for the Board: Teena Ingram and John Gougoulis. We continue to seek additional new Board members to realise our goal of extending the size of the Board. A larger Board is proving necessary to meet all the governance requirements as well as project management as, in order to minimise administrative costs, we do not employ any staff.

##### Project Co-ordinator Changes

After more than 15 years of hard work, Amanda Stone has stepped down as the SEDS Sustainable Agriculture Project Coordinator. Amanda initially joined the Partners in Aid Board after visiting SEDS independently and being very impressed by the work the team did. She subsequently took over as SEDS Project Coordinator and later became Chair of our Board.

Amanda has always had a passion for the environment and for sustainable agriculture, and this underpinned much of her work with both Partners in Aid and SEDS in particular. Her knowledge and commitment have been invaluable. As a former Chair, Amanda also implemented changes to keep our organisation compliant with increasingly complex statutory requirements. Her work has been very much appreciated by everyone both in Partners in Aid and in SEDS and we sincerely thank her for her contribution.

We recently welcomed Michael Oates as the new Project Coordinator for this project.

Jacquie O'Brien, also a past Board member who later continued stayed on as Project Coordinator for the Sri Lankan project, has also needed to resign for personal reasons. We very much appreciate all the work she has done for Partners in Aid. Roger Hughes and Teena Ingram have taken over as joint Project Coordinators for the Sri Lankan project.

## 6. Increased cyber security of our records

Following a minor IT breach in 2022, we engaged the services of an Australian IT company to improve our cyber security. We were fortunate that last year's intrusion did not result in access by nefarious actors to the personal information of any donors or overseas beneficiaries, or information relating to any non-public project matters.

## 7. Compliance

Financial statements prepared in accordance with the requirements of the ACFID Code Audited financial statements in accordance with the Australian Council for International Development's (ACFID) Code of Conduct will be uploaded to the Partners in Aid website.

### Commitment to full adherence to the ACFID Code of Conduct

Partners in Aid continues to be a member of ACFID and is committed to full adherence to its Code of Conduct

### Commitment to full adherence to the ACFID Fund Raising Charter

We are also in compliance with ACFID's Fund Raising Charter.

### Identification of the ability to lodge a complaint against Partners in Aid

Complaints about the organisation or board can be directed to the Chair and details of this are also on the website: <http://partnersinaid.org.au/contact-us/>.

### Identification of the ability to lodge a complaint for breach of the Code of Conduct

If anyone wishes to lodge a complaint for breach of the Code of Conduct, they are advised on our website that this can be done directly to ACFID (<http://partnersinaid.org.au/contact-us/>).

## 8. Acknowledgements

Before concluding, I would like also to acknowledge the contributions made by our other directors and committee members throughout the year, especially:

- Lyn and Ian Pickering who have continued to provide and maintain our registered office at their home and manage the incoming phone queries. Lyn has also continued

with the very demanding task of directing the SEDS Child Education Sponsorship Program, including undertaking the reams of paperwork this requires.

- Phillip McMillan who still kindly prints our four newsletters a year free of charge.
- Dr Anne-Marie Maltby, Michael Oates and Dr Roger Hughes who continue to liaise with the projects for which they are Project Coordinators.
- Andrea Pickering, our former Treasurer who resigned a couple of years ago but has continued to assume responsibility for much of the financial work, despite working full-time, helping run a farm and bringing up four very active young children.

Finally, I would like to end by saying thank you once again to all our donors and supporters and wishing you all the best for the coming year. Partners in Aid, together with our Partner Organisations, could not be assisting the communities with which we are involved, and their thousands of residents, without your generous support.

**DR CECILY NEIL**

**Chair**

**16 November 2023**